

## Taliban on a Time Crunch?

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### Introduction

Periodically, external powers have sought to exert their dominance in Afghanistan, often overlooking the local dynamics. In the wake of the British intervention during the 19th century and subsequent Soviet influence involvement in the 20th century, the emergence of the United States as a global superpower post-World War II led it to perceive an apparent compulsion to partake in the established tradition of intervening in Afghanistan. The creation of the Taliban was a consequential element in the overarching strategy to extricate the Russians from Afghanistan. However, in an unexpected turn of events, the Taliban have now, to their surprise as much as ours, successfully seized control.

The Afghan populace in the early 2000s, wearied by years of conflict, found themselves deprived of a voice in determining their governance, thus becoming unwilling participants in the American experiment of democratization. The unfolding sequence of events, from then until the present moment, has prompted individuals across the societal spectrum—from street vendors to students and diplomats ensconced in their offices—to ponder the contemporary and impending ramifications.

The Taliban's significance as a force in global politics derives from their capacity to exert influence over a sizable population, not from their influence being inherently positive in nature, as they would like to perceive. While the Taliban may hold a significant position in the realm of global politics, their practical governance of Afghanistan confronts multifaceted challenges. Presently, they find themselves engaged in a struggle not only to secure their legitimacy but also to transform virtually every facet of the state. This encompasses political, economic, legal, social, judicial, educational, healthcare-related, and many

other dimensions, reflecting the extensive scope of their efforts to reshape the Afghan landscape.

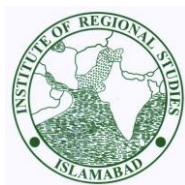
The Taliban see themselves as the saviours Afghanistan requires, aiming to reconstruct the state and restore its honourable standing on the international stage. However, this viewpoint lacks widespread support among various factions, and their present position generates a noticeably limited degree of satisfaction.

In an interview, Mufti Abdul Matin Qani, a Taliban spokesman and a policy adviser at the Afghanistan's Ministry of Culture and Information, expressed the view that the failure of the Americans in fulfilling their mission can be attributed to their creation of turmoil in the country, disregard for the freedoms, national interest, and religious beliefs of its people. According to Qani, such actions can be considered acts of cruelty that are destined to be unsuccessful.<sup>1</sup> The Taliban are ironically following in the footsteps of their opponent, albeit with a different slogan, which Qani forgot to either register or mention.

Since the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan for the second time following the US withdrawal, they appear to have become somewhat more astute as an organization. The strategic manoeuvring through which they took control of Afghanistan in just ten days was impressive. Upon being questioned about how they planned to address issues such as political instability, regressive economic conditions, security challenges, and humanitarian crisis, the Taliban political office patiently responded that they were mindful of the current obstacles but it would take time, both in terms of implementation and witnessing the outcomes. This stems from the fact that the Taliban have taken on the responsibility of improving the lives of Afghans, and according to them, almost everything needs to be rebuilt from the ground up so

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that Muslims can attain their rightful place and status.

A significant question arises from the statement: How much time? And, as much time as it takes, do the Taliban have that much time to achieve all they aspire to and the level of revolution they desire?

### The Undesirable Afghan Government

The Taliban's current objectives closely resemble those of the 1990s: to seize control of Kabul and establish an Islamic Emirate based on *sharia* law.<sup>2</sup> Having succeeded in one part of their plan has given them the much-needed confidence to proceed with the rest of their multi-layered schemes. These plans have been made public on multiple occasions, and current political individuals have frequently assured interviewers that they are committed to doing the 'principled' thing and ensuring that the people are ultimately satisfied.

The rest of the world waits with bated breath to see if the Taliban can withstand increasing domestic and international pressures, or if they will cave. It is important to note that the Taliban's performance in certain areas has contributed to the stability of the country. However, it remains unclear whether their efforts will aid them in overcoming the numerous obstacles they face. The delicate balance between what they have accomplished and the enormous problems that lie ahead is a conundrum that could either strengthen or weaken their position.

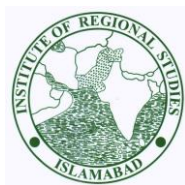
Over the past two years, the Taliban government has repetitively backtracked on its promises, some of its policies getting progressively worse, one overshadowing the previous one with dire consequences. Education for girls and women has gradually been restricted, as has employment for women. These regressive actions have raised serious concerns among UN experts, who assert that two decades of progress in women's and girls' rights have been swiftly reversed since the Taliban's takeover.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, freedom of expression has been curtailed, leading to the detention and mistreatment of dissidents, while the intelligence directorate has seen a significant expansion in its powers.<sup>4</sup>

The Taliban's socioeconomic failures and human rights violations have naturally drawn the most international attention and rightly so. The Taliban have shown little willingness to engage in meaningful formal dialogue with other Afghans about governing the country. Nonetheless, much of the international community has made inclusivity a prerequisite for normalising relations and recognising the government. There will need to be a national dialogue when the Taliban finally sit down to draw a new constitution.<sup>5</sup> Suhail Shaheen, a Taliban spokesman and negotiator, in the initial days of takeover in 2021 told the press that the militants will hold talks in the coming days in an effort to form an open and inclusive Islamic government,<sup>6</sup> which, unfortunately, has not yet occurred. Currently, Afghanistan does not have a constitution, as the one adopted in 2004 by the previous regime was suspended following the Taliban takeover. For the constitution-writing process to be legitimate, additional political actors must be involved.

For an all-rounder constitution, the Taliban need to strike discussions with political parties such as Jamiat-e-Islami, Hezb-e-Islami, civil society organizations like the Afghan Women's Network and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), ethnic and religious leaders of ethnic groups, such as Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks. At the international level they should consider engaging with their neighbouring countries with assistance of global agencies as moderators so that they can offer expertise and guidance in constitution-making.

Although the Taliban have not used Covid-19 as a pretext to repress, their presence has reduced access to basic rights such as medical care, as Afghanistan is highly dependent on Western donor and humanitarian support as well as imports of medical equipment and supplies.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, since March 2022, the Taliban have taken advantage of the world's dwindling attention towards them to implement stricter laws that increase assaults on Afghans, particularly women. The lack of information lets assaults and repression go unreported.<sup>8</sup>



### **Looming Fate of the Afghan Taliban**

The state's pursuit of national security and the fulfilment of its responsibilities create a foundational framework for ensuring human security among its masses. Governance, in this context, extends beyond provision of security. It functions as a critical mechanism for achieving human security and safeguarding citizens' well-being. The interdependence between national security and human security is a vital recognition, with the latter reinforcing the former.

In the Afghan context, the Taliban, possibly emboldened by what seems to be a favourable environment for their operations, may believe that they can maintain prolonged control. They have demonstrated organizational astuteness and appear to have learned from past mistakes, even as they persist in their oppressive governance patterns. Nevertheless, a critical aspect they seem to overlook, partially due to their origins as a non-political organization and their limited grasp of political realities, is the precarious nature of governance when the public feels insecure under their rule. History demonstrates that bottom-up revolutionary movements often emerge from widespread dissatisfaction among the people. No nation can endure prolonged oppression; such conditions inevitably sow the seeds of change. It is crucial for the Taliban to recognize this dynamic, as they may find themselves caught off guard when their hold on power is challenged in the very same way they challenged the West.

In Afghanistan, threats to freedom from want and freedom from fear are inextricably bound. That is, coupled with the perpetual exposure to the Taliban's threat, physical violence and harm against individuals underscore the people's vulnerability due to deprivation and development that increases their exposure to the Taliban's ideological abuses.

### **Battered but Hopeful Afghans**

Throughout their history, Afghans have consistently displayed remarkable resilience when confronted with oppression and the imposition of rules that vehemently oppose their values. It is essential to acknowledge that this historical trend is

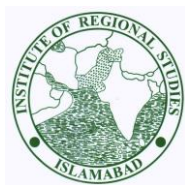
unlikely to alter at this juncture. Current conditions, characterized by a populace seeking a government they genuinely deserve, respect, and identify with, are expected to continue, serving as a catalyst for change. Historical precedent reveals that no sustained oppression can deter a population's collective desire for a more just government. Consequently, Afghanistan's trajectory underscores that the pursuit of an equitable and acceptable government is not a transient aspiration but a deeply ingrained and indomitable aspect of its political dynamics.

If the Taliban are merely ruling and administering justice with Islamic principles, nobody would have had a concern. Nevertheless, their version of Islam is highly charged and at odds with everyone else's. Although it is very early to make an objective assessment of the current Taliban regime, a comparison of the current regime with the pre-2001 regime reveals little difference. Thus, it is not incorrect to assert that such regime's rule is likely to elucidate significant ontological insecurity in the urban population, leading to mistrust of Afghans' basic sense of safety and misrecognition of their true identity—an insecurity which might result in the Taliban's demise.<sup>9</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Within the rich tapestry of Islamic traditions, there lies a profound commitment to safeguarding human rights while effecting necessary changes with the utmost restraint, aiming to minimize destruction and collateral damage. This perspective stands in stark contrast to the approach witnessed during the Afghan Taliban's political resurgence in 2021. It is incumbent upon them to recognize that the imposition of ideologies, whether the Western-originated democratic paradigm or the extremist interpretations of Islamic traditions, often runs counter to the Afghan people's historical experience of resistance.

Any form of governance must, therefore, reflect the collective will of the Afghan people, emphasizing inclusivity, local autonomy, and a commitment to their prosperity and stability. This principle remains paramount for achieving lasting



peace in the region and earning the trust of Afghans who have, throughout history, demonstrated an unwavering spirit in the face of adversity.

There are two timelines coexisting for the Afghan government as of right now: one is of the Taliban whilst the other consists of the Afghan public and international actors. The retention of Taliban in power will be determined by which actor domineers more or crumbles first. The Afghan people, the essence of the country, embody humanity's indefatigable spirit. While their spirit is undeniably strong, it is still vulnerable to the trials of their turbulent history. It is a realisation that has gradually

permeated global consciousness, including that of Western nations.

A rethinking of international engagement is required in this new chapter of Afghanistan's history. The benevolence and goodwill that were previously withheld should now be lavishly bestowed upon a region that has faced great adversity. Furthermore, a united front comprised of both the Afghans and the international actors united in the pursuit of freedom and the protection of human rights has the potential to result in the regime's demise. As pressure mounts from all sides, the Taliban may find itself in a difficult situation with few options for resolving it.

### Notes and References

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